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Inventory
for

Manuscript Collection
MS-471

Captain John Bernet Papers

Inclusive dates 1895-1938
Bulk 1895-1897, 1904-1912

by
Nathan R. Lipfert

August 2017

Two Folders
Accession # 2006.087.01

A PART OF THE CAPTAIN W. J. LEWIS PARKER BEQUEST

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Abstract

Bernet, John, *Captain* (1863-1941)

Papers, 1895-1938, bulk 1895-1897, 1904-1912

Two folders

Master mariner of Rockland (ME), Swiss-born.

Account book of operating expenses for the Rockland schooner *Jas. L. Maloy,* 1895-1897, while in the command of Capt. Bernet. Also, an account book recording expenses for the three-mast schooners *William Bisbee* (1904), *Helvetia* (1905 -1910) and *J. Frank Seavey* (1911-1912), while Bernet was in command. There are circa eight loose papers found in the volumes, including drafts of letters of recommendation by the captain.

Bequeathed by Capt. W. J. Lewis Parker in 2006.

MS-471; Accession # 2006.087.01

Finding aid in repository; folder level control.

Added entries—people

Bernet, John, *Captain*

Bernet, Nellie M. (Baker)

Davis, A. P.

McFadden, Warren J.

Added entries—corporate bodies (including vessels)

Helvetia (Three-mast schooner)

J. Frank Seavey (Three-mast schooner)

Jas. L. Maloy (Schooner)

Sailors Snug Harbor

William Bisbee (Three-mast schooner)

Added entries—places

Rockland (ME)

Added entries—key terms

Coal trade

Lime industry

Logwood

Acquisition

These papers of Captain John Bernet were bequeathed to Maine Maritime Museum from the estate of Capt. W. J. Lewis Parker in November and December 2006.

Provenance

Capt. Parker was an extremely knowledgeable collector and an expert on North American schooners. He picked up many parts of his collection of maritime papers by purchase from dealers, auctions, or estate sales, and by

gifts from relatives of maritime figures. We have found no documentation of how he acquired this particular group of manuscripts. We believe he collected them because of his interest in coasting schooners and their work. These papers were found in Captain Parker's study with other similar items, and were part of his maritime library which he bequeathed to Maine Maritime Museum.

Restrictions

There are no restrictions on the use of these materials for study or research. Researchers should seek permission to obtain copies, and for publication of any sort.

Physical Condition

These volumes have the usual surface dirt and minor tears of late 19th-early 20th-century documents. Overall, the Capt. Bernet papers are in good condition.

Biographical/Historical Notes

Captain John Bernet was born in St. Gall, Switzerland in 1863, and arrived in the U.S. at New York about 1878, aged about fifteen. He became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1887, already living in Rockland (ME). He probably was a mariner then, although he was not listed in the Rockland directories until 1899, when he was already a master mariner. He married Nellie M. Baker of Salem (CT) September 30, 1891, and their daughter Evelyn A. Bernet was born in October 1892. Nellie sailed with her husband for 25 years.

From the Waldoboro District registers and enrollments, we know he was part owner and commander of four schooners: *John P. Kelsey* (1890-1891), *Jas. L. Maloy* (1892-1897), *William Bisbee* (1902-1904) and *Helvetia* (1905). The *Kelsey* and the *Maloy* were two-masters; the *Bisbee* and *Helvetia* three-masters.

From articles in the Bath newspapers, we learn that Bernet also commanded the *Cornelia Soule* (three-mast schooner) in 1902 and the *J. Frank Seavey* (three-mast schooner) in 1912 and later. Command of the *Helvetia* in 1905-1910 and *Seavey* in 1911-1913 is confirmed in the contents of this collection.

There is another Captain John Bernet Collection, dated 1897-1932, which is manuscript collection number 122 at Mystic Seaport in Mystic CT. It

contains 82 pieces and two volumes, and covers some of the same vessels as the MMM collection does, as well as others.

Nellie M. Bernet died in 1940, Captain John Bernet in 1941. They are buried in the Achorn Cemetary in Rockland (ME).

Scope and Content Notes

Folder 1 contains an account book of operating expenses for the Rockland schooner *Jas. L. Maloy,* 1895-1897, while in the command of Capt. Bernet. The book does not appear to contain the name of this vessel, so it may be that Capt. Parker identified the account book with this vessel by determining that Bernet commanded the *Maloy* during the dates that the book covers. Or, he may have matched dates the *Maloy* was in specific ports with notation in the book, by using the New York Maritime Register or other sources. A loose receipt containing the words "Schr. Jas. L. Maloy" was found in the book. The account book documents many voyages carrying lime from Rockland to places in the New York-New Jersey area, returning with cargoes of coal. There are occasional voyages with cargoes of cement and logwood. Vessel expenses and port charges are recorded, along with freight income ("stock").

Folder 2 contains an account book recording expenses for the three-mast schooners *William Bisbee* (1904), *Helvetia* (1905 -1910) and *J. Frank Seavey* (1911-1912), while Bernet was in command. The book shows purchases for the vessel, captain's expenses, port expenses, and income from freight, referred to as "stock." The *Bisbee* made a number of voyages from Maine with granite to Annapolis MD, bringing back coal from Baltimore to Bath ME, piling from Norfolk to New York, timber from Virginia to Camden ME and Bath ME, and crushed oyster shell from Baltimore to Portland ME.

Helvetia took granite from Maine to the Norfolk Navy Yard and coal back to Rockland ME, Gloucester MA, North Plymouth, and Wilmington, lumber from Fernandina FL to Stamford CT, timber from Virginia to Bath ME and Camden ME, piling from Norfolk to Boston, railroad ties from Alexandria VA to New York, cement and plaster from New Jersey to Charleston, lumber from Charleston to New York, coal from New York to Boston, and water pipe from Elizabethport NJ to Boston. Other cargoes for *Helvetia* included paving stone, powder, boilers, fertilizer, yellow pine, and oyster shells. Other ports she visited include Philadelphia, Newburyport, Frankfort ME, Hurricane Island ME, Vinalhaven ME, Port Reading, Belfast ME, Providence, Calais ME, Savannah, Saco ME, Salem, Jacksonville, Brunswick GA and Portland ME.

In the section covering the voyages of the *J. Frank Seavey*, the author began to use the preprinted lines in the book more clearly, setting down income

and expense in separate columns. The vessel was employed much as the previous two were, carrying granite or paving stone out of Maine and bringing coal back. Other cargoes included cement coming north and lumber, pulp wood and gravel going south. Ports include South Amboy, Rockland ME, New York, Bangor ME, New Haven, New Rochelle, Gloucester, Sullivan ME, New York, Hoboken, and Perth Amboy. This volume also includes a penciled, detailed and undated draft of an obituary for Captain Bernet's wife Nellie M. Bernet.

There are circa eight loose papers found in the volumes, including drafts of letters of recommendation by the captain. Two of the three letters or drafts are dated Aug. 18, 1938; all three certify that Warren J. McFadden sailed with Capt. Bernet as mate in several of the vessels documented in this collection. Another letter draft, dated July 22, 1922 in New York, is written in support of A. P. Davis's application for admission to Sailors Snug Harbor.